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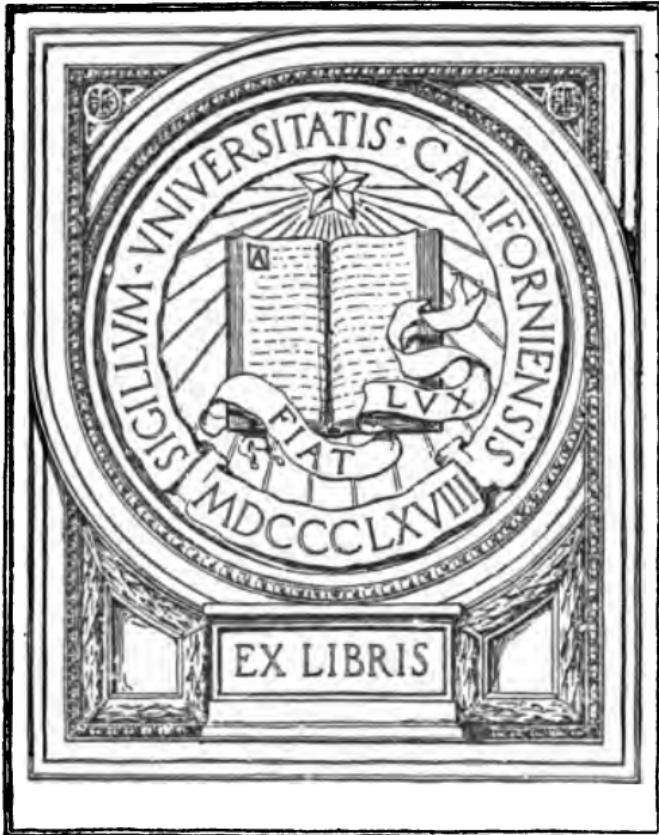
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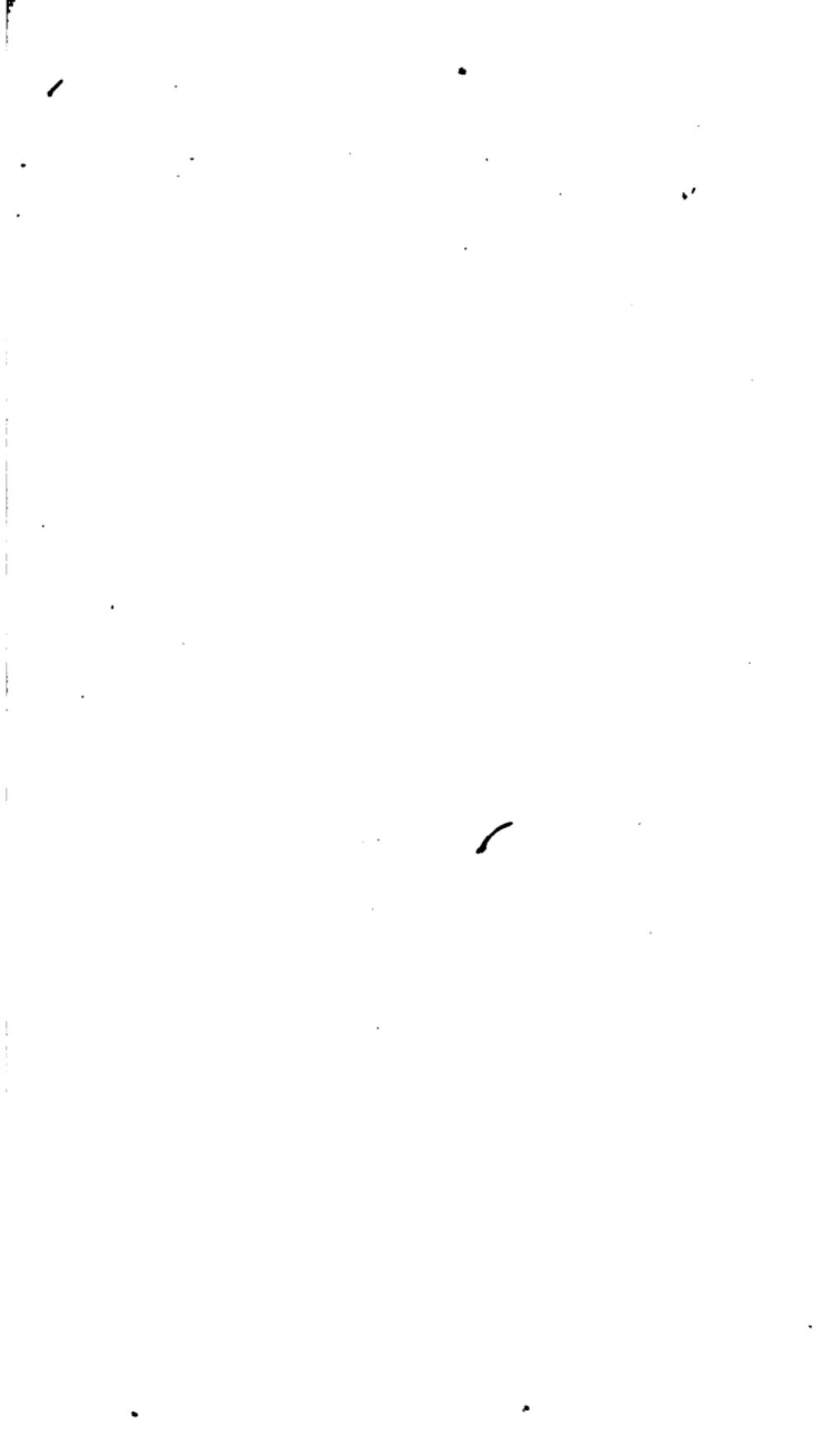
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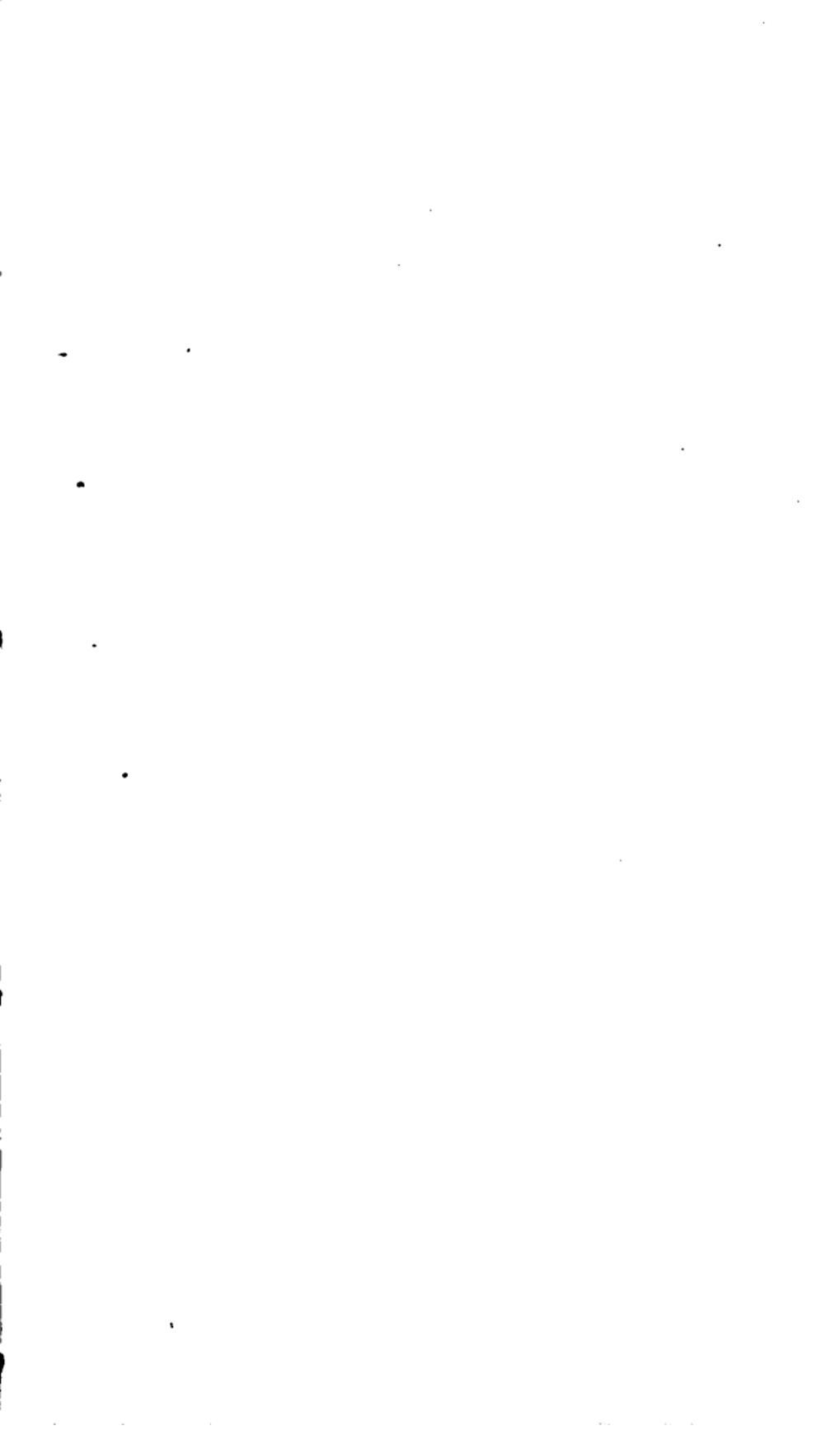
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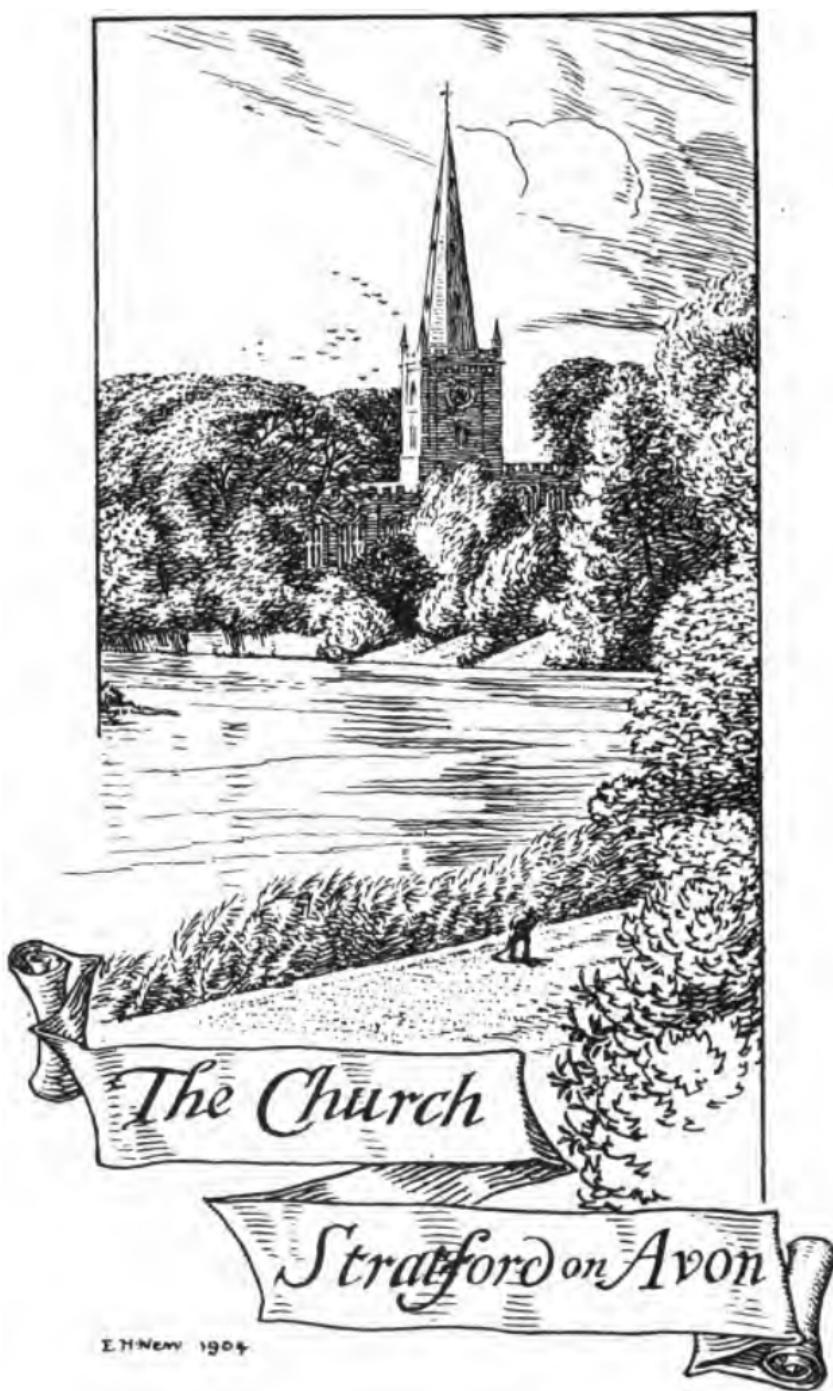
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Stratford-on-Avon

CHAPTER I

THE TOWN

THE town of Stratford-on-Avon lies in the heart of England, in a district once covered by the great forest of Arden, where Touchstone and Audrey talked, as we would fain believe. Even men who have rambled widely, knowing and loving our country as she deserves to be known and loved, find peculiar charms of scenery or association in the town or its immediate neighbourhood. The worthiest men and women of other lands deem it a labour of love, perhaps a pilgrimage of pleasure, to cross continents and seas that they may visit the Warwickshire town which gave to England her greatest master of written speech, her shrewdest observer of the hearts and minds of men. My purpose here is not to tell the story of Stratford, a story often told, nor to write a description of the town as we see it to-day ; but to point out, as concisely as possible, some

TO WALK AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON

features of paramount interest or enduring charm.

We do not know at what period this town first became known as the *street* that led towards the *ford* across the Avon. Neolithic man, bands of Celts, legionaries of Rome, and Saxon settlers were here in turn before 1085, when the Domesday Survey placed on record the first account and valuation of the manor, then comprising less than 2000 acres, occupied largely by men who, as Mr. Sidney Lee puts it, were "in virtual serfdom." The lord of the manor was also Bishop of Worcester, to whose see *Stretforde* had belonged since, in 691, Ethelred of Mercia had bestowed its monastery upon Egwin, third Bishop of the diocese. Thus, when searching out the antiquities of Stratford, we find that here, as in so many neighbourhoods in England, our earliest data bring us in touch with monastic legend or ecclesiastical chronicle. The monastery, founded thus far back in the twilight of Saxon history, was built, as tradition states, on the spot where the grey tower of Holy Trinity Church looks down upon the waters of the winding Avon, as it did, perhaps, six hundred years ago.

The history of that monastery is lost in obscurity—save for the fact that the Bishops of Worcester only retained it after some strife with successive rulers of Mercia.

THE TOWN

Monastery and town were probably almost coeval, the one giving rise to the other. The first houses in Stratford would thus be near the river and the monastery, forming, at least approximately, the thoroughfare known to-day as the Old Town. Towards the close of the eleventh century these dwellers in the *vill* probably numbered less than two hundred souls, for the Domesday Survey alluded to twenty-nine men, each the head of a family. For the most part, their life-work was to supply the needs of the monks, and by so doing obtain their own daily bread. They ground their corn at the manor mill below the ford : the Bishop, like non-clerical lords of other manors, was entitled to a fee for its use, often paid by a supply of eels for the table of his Lordship. Thus the monastery was for many years conducive to the growth and prosperity of the town. For we know that the monk laboured as strenuously as he prayed. He felled trees ; he helped the serf with his tillage ; he drove the wolf into the farther forest ; he caused the wilderness and the solitary place to be glad.

The solitary places around Stratford were soon dotted with industrious homesteads. Oaks, then more abundant, afforded pannage (*i.e.* acorn-feed) for many hogs ; the rich pastures beside the Avon supported large herds of cattle. An important era

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

in the history of the town was reached when, in the days of Richard I., the right to hold a market in Stratford each Thursday was obtained by the Bishop of Worcester, who charged the townsmen sixteen shillings yearly for the exercise of the privilege. The present Rother Market, near the centre of the town, marks the spot where drovers brought their cattle together to this weekly sale, "Rother" being derived from an Anglo-Saxon word which signifies horned cattle. At this spot stood a large cross of stone. The market, after a while, fell almost into desuetude; early in the fourteenth century it became again important. Moreover, of five annual fairs which the townsmen enjoyed, four were largely occupied with the trade in cattle. This feature in Stratford's commercial life arose very naturally from the situation of the town near well-watered pastures. As Shakespeare puts it in "*Timon of Athens*," "the pasture lards the rother's sides." Dealers in corn and other produce of fertile Warwickshire were wont to barter their wares around the High Cross, at the north end of the present High Street, between Rother Market and the bridge across the Avon —the "poor bridge of timber" of which John Leland wrote.

English to the core, the men of Stratford have ever loved their town, and have been

THE TOWN

jealous for its prosperity. In the earlier days of its history, generous hearts and willing hands contributed to its improvement. Conspicuous among such in the fourteenth century were two brothers, John and Robert de Stratford, and their nephew Ralph. The three men became distinguished prelates; the two brothers were statesmen also, holding in turn the Chancellorship of England. To this family the town owed many benefactions. A chapel for the Guild of the Holy Cross was founded by Robert, father of these brothers, some time during the reign of Edward I.; there is, perhaps, no doubt that the chapel stood where the Guild Chapel now stands, as in Mr. New's drawing, at the meeting of Church Street and Chapel Lane. The Guild itself was of immemorial antiquity; its members cared for the souls of the living and the dead, and fostered all manner of spiritual ministrations among themselves; but its story can only receive passing reference here. The Guild Chapel was sanctioned by Godfrey Giffard, Bishop of Worcester, in 1269; Robert de Stratford was appointed its first Master. In the following year the Bishop granted a forty days' indulgence to all who had presented gifts to the Guild; the patronage of this religious but non-ecclesiastical community was by such means fostered, and much property was bestowed upon it. The Register, dating from 1353,

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

is extant ; from its entries we learn that at one time there stood, in almost every street in Stratford, some house belonging to the Guild of the Holy Cross.

John de Stratford, born in the neighbourhood of the town in a late decade of the thirteenth century, went presently to Oxford, where, under the "beautiful tower of Merton," as Mr. Lang calls it, he studied to good purpose. Some time parson at Stratford, he became Archdeacon of Lincoln in 1319 and Bishop of Winchester in 1323. Ten years later he was Archbishop of Canterbury. Despite his many preferments, he remembered his native town to the last. Shortly before his elevation to the Archiepiscopate he built the south aisle of the church of his kinsfolk, and placed at its east end a chapel to the memory of St. Thomas à Becket. Some years ago, the *mensa*, or altar slab, of this chapel was unearthed in the south aisle ; it was placed upon the High Altar in the chancel, and thereby, as the Rev. G. Arbuthnot writes, "restored to its sacred use." Moreover, John subsequently converted the chapel into a chantry, endowing it with five mass-priests ; and finally, purchasing from the Bishop the patronage of the church, he bestowed it upon the priests of his chantry, who henceforth controlled its organisations. Readers may trace the doings of

THE TOWN

John de Stratford, in the higher spheres of ecclesiasticism, in the pages of Hook ; and may see his sermons in manuscript in the library of Hereford Cathedral. He died at Mayfield in Sussex in 1348, and sleeps near the High Altar of Canterbury Cathedral.

Robert de Stratford, who was probably at Merton with John, is remembered in the town annals for his service as rector, in which office he apparently succeeded his brother, and for his efforts to improve the streets. In his day there were already many dwellers on either side of the road towards Henley-in-Arden ; in Greenhill Street, whence men found their way to *Aulcester* ; and in other thoroughfares nearer the church. Hitherto little more than rude tracks, parson Robert resolved to pave them, and in 1332, by obtaining leave to tax the produce brought by farmers into the town, he “defrayed the charge thereof.” He could hardly have done a greater service to his fellow-townsmen. Soon after the granting of the toll, Robert quitted Stratford ; “other palms were won” ; and he was honoured in 1335 with the Chancellorship of the University of Oxford. Two years later, Robert was consecrated Bishop of Chichester by his brother John, and, dying in 1362, was buried in the cathedral of his diocese. Ralph, his nephew (there is, I believe, a

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

doubt as to the relationship), is known to have owned a house in Bridge Street, and to have built "a house of square stone," a little westward from the church, for the mass priests of John's chantry. That



BRIDGE STREET

household became the College of Stratford; the church, served and directed by this college of priests, was styled, from the days of Henry V., the Collegiate Church of the Holy Trinity.

The mention of Bridge Street brings me to the last pre-Shakespearean townsman of whom I have space to write in this little book. Sir Hugh Clopton, who took his name from the manor of Clopton, near by

THE TOWN

—granted to his yeoman-ancestor, Robert, by Peter de Montfort—became closely associated with Stratford towards the close of the fifteenth century. About 1483 he built, on the site now occupied by New Place—of which more anon—a “pretty” house, in which he passed many of his latter days. Now at that time the old bridge over the Avon was in a sorry state. Moreover, as there was no constructed approach to it on either side, it could with difficulty be reached when the river overflowed its banks, as it does to-day. Sir Hugh resolved to remedy this grievance. He built in its stead the broad bridge of fourteen arches of freestone, much as we see it to-day; it was, however, widened in 1814. Dr. B. C. A. Windle has recently reminded us that the second arch on the eastern side was destroyed by the Parliamentarian army in 1645, and rebuilt in 1652. Dugdale justly called it a “fair Bridg of Stone over Avon,” and from the time of Henry VII. to the present day it has been, on the whole, the most cherished of many gifts bestowed upon the town.

Many Cloptons sleep in the Clopton Chapel, formerly the Chapel of Our Lady, in the parish church. But Sir Hugh sleeps not among them. In his will he recorded his wish that he might there be buried in the tomb which he had himself prepared, but he died in London in 1496, and was laid

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

to rest in the church of St. Margaret's, Lothbury, "until the day break and the shadows flee away." In 1804 some frescoes were discovered on the roof and walls of the Guild Chapel; drawings of them were executed by Thomas Fisher, and are preserved in the Memorial Library. Quaintly conceived, they represent the history of the Holy Cross, the martyrdom of St. Thomas of Canterbury, the combat between St. George and the Dragon, and other subjects. The men of Stratford, in pre-Reformation days, must often have gazed upon these realistic paintings with admiring eyes. They owed them, as they owed their largest bridge, to the liberality of Sir Hugh Clopton, who in part rebuilt the Guild Chapel, so close to his own house, and provided the funds for its artistic adornment.

Thus, ere the bells in a thousand towers had rung in the "spacious times of great Elizabeth," this village community beside the Avon had grown into a typical mid-English town. Times had changed, and manners had changed with them. While Henry VIII. was on the throne, the author of a book entitled "Surveyinge" complained that in his day a free man could become bond; but Mr. Leadam considers that serfdom entirely disappeared during the reign of Elizabeth. Bacon, in 1600, discussed, at Gray's Inn, the legal status of

THE TOWN

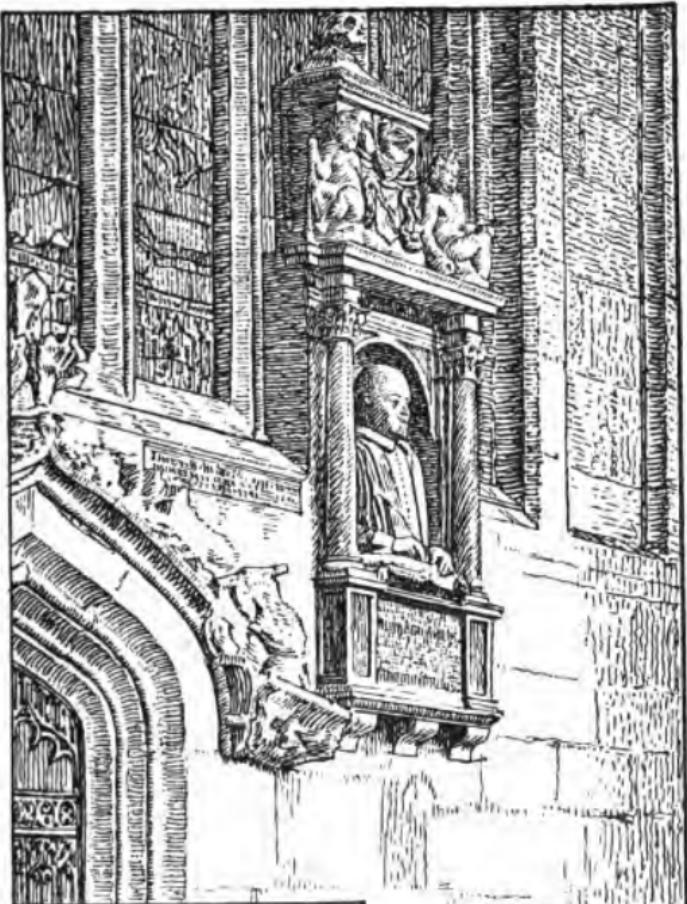
villeins ; but villeinage had for many years been a mere shadow of its former self. When we find the bondman and the villein prominent in Tudor history, we must remember, as Mr. Savine recently pointed out to the Royal Historical Society, that in those days the words frequently signified no more than common folk, or peasantry. Men were already turning from hamlet and village to a life of more varied activity in town or city. During the first half of the sixteenth century there was growing up in Stratford, as in other towns, an increasing body of men who plied an honest trade for their own profit, or took themselves elsewhere for similar purposes when they pleased.



CHAPTER II

SHAKESPEARE

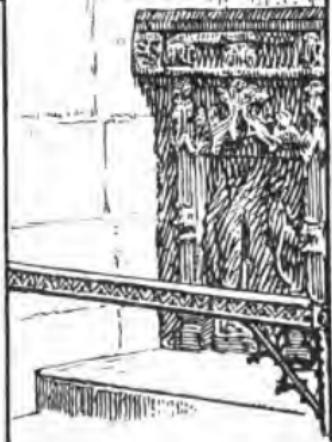
ABOUT sixty-four years after the death of Sir Hugh Clopton, died Richard Shakespeare, who had farmed a parcel of land at Snitterfield, a pleasant village on hilly ground, four miles to the north of Stratford. John Shakespeare, one of his three sons, married, in 1557, with Mary Arden of Asbies, who brought him a considerable property, including the farm which his father had tilled. The farm had been rented by Richard Shakespeare from her father, Robert Arden, who died in 1556, and was buried in the old church of St. John the Baptist, at Aston Cantlow. About four miles to the south of Henley-in-Arden, the village of Aston Cantlow lies in a quiet neighbourhood where you may glean memories of former days. It is probable that Mary Arden was married to John Shakespeare in the church where her father had so lately been laid to rest. With her property she brought to her husband a gentle lineage and an unsullied name. That name is indelibly associated with the neighbouring village of Wilm-



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SHAKESPEARE

cote, where “Mary Arden’s Cottage” is still pointed out to wayfarers—a house of stout oak timbers, plastered exterior, dormer windows, and steeply sloping roof where pigeons preen their wings in the summer sun. Its garden is bounded by a low wall, built of stones from the adjacent quarry. If uniform tradition is of any worth, we can hardly doubt that this “cottage” was once the home of Mary Arden.

John Shakespeare had previously left the family at Snitterfield and had moved into Stratford, probably in the year 1551, when the town itself contained less than two thousand persons. Between Sir Hugh Clopton’s death and John Shakespeare’s arrival, Stratford had known changes of aspect and fortune ; it was to know many more ere, in 1599, a Harleian MS. described it as a “good markette towne.” The Reformation had left its mark on church and congregation alike ; in 1547 its College Chantry was suppressed. A ground-plan of the town, published in the “History of New Place” by Mr. J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps, shows that a large proportion of its streets must have been known to John Shakespeare by their present names.

In 1552, John Shakespeare lived on the north side of Henley Street, in a commodious house, such as would then be regarded as no mean residence. It was

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

built of oak from the forest of Arden, which, as Mr. Salt Brassington remarks, was "tough enough to last a thousand years." He was a woolstapler and a glover; he traded, as we know, in corn and timber; he is believed to have also sold meat. In the autumn of 1558 his wife bore him a daughter, whom he named Joan; four years afterwards was born his daughter Margaret. Both died in infancy. Yet a year and a half, and John and Mary became the parents of William Shakespeare, probably on St. George's Day, April 23, 1564—when Drayton was in his cradle, when Bacon was a toddling child, when Spenser and Sidney and Raleigh were boys at play. Surely the morning stars sang together at his birth. "There is no regiment of highest Dignitaries," wrote Carlyle, "that we would sell him for. He is the grandest thing we have yet done."

Shakespeare was born in the year of the great frost, when the Thames froze from side to side above London Bridge. The year was memorable in Stratford, too, for the plague broke out in the town, as it had done before; the angel of death passed from door to door, and one person in every seven perished. But the angel passed over before the doorway of John Shakespeare, whose son was but a few weeks old, even as, so many centuries before, he had spared

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the blood-besprinkled doorways in the land of Egypt. On April 26th the child was baptized in the parish church, in the old font still shown to the curious, battered and broken indeed, but retaining the well-cut quatrefoils in its panels. The event was duly recorded in the Register: "*April 26th—Gulielmus, filius Johannes Shakespare.*" Photographic copies of the leaf upon which that record is inscribed are cherished souvenirs in homes on both sides of the Atlantic.

The life of John Shakespeare was closely knit with the lives of his fellow-townsmen. As years passed he experienced the uses of adversity, and learned, like the Rosalind of his son's fancy, "how full of briars is this working-day world." The ancient borough of Stratford became a municipal corporation soon after his settlement in Henley Street, and he was early associated with its public life. One of his first offices was that of ale-taster, an office which required him to regulate the price and quality of ale and beer sold in Stratford. In 1561 he was chamberlain of the town; in 1565 an alderman; in 1571 senior alderman or Magister. But honours brought anxieties in their train, and from 1575, when he bought his house in Henley Street from one Edmund Hall for forty pounds, his reverses were many. We know, for instance, that he mortgaged

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Asbies ; that he sold his interest in lands at Snitterfield ; that he went to law for the recovery of small sums due to himself. But he was a prominent townsman to the last ; and his name figures sixty-six times in the Council books of the Corporation, where it is spelt in sixteen different ways.

The town of Stratford, at this period, was probably no worse cared for than other towns in England. But at this distance of time we can hardly realise the filthy condition of its streets, or the unseemly doings of its inhabitants. A "muck-hill" was officially permitted at six specified sites ; these were cleared only twice a year, nor did they prevent the intermediate streets being littered with offal and rubbish of all kinds. Pigs wallowed before their owner's doorway, or wandered hither and thither in the open street. Apparently municipal legislation was powerless to remove such nuisances ; we even read of a vicar who, in 1613, was questioned by the council touching a pigsty which he had erected in the public way. The council, indeed, did what it could for the welfare of the town ; but the townsmen were refractory. In the year of John Shakespeare's marriage an order was issued compelling certain classes of the community, in the depth of winter, to hang a lanthorn before their doorway from five to eight in the evening. "Sanitary arrangements within

SHAKESPEARE

the house were obviously not much heeded. The clay floors, whether or no strewn with rushes, attracted all manner of refuse, and were rarely swept." In a word, the condition of Stratford was similar to that



ALMSHOUSES, GRAMMAR SCHOOL, AND GUILD
CHAPEL (STRATFORD-ON-AVON)

of a hundred other English towns in the "good old days."

Of William Shakespeare's life at Stratford, as a boy, we know hardly anything; nor have I space to discuss conjectures, or their relative degree of plausibility. He

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was sent to the Grammar School adjoining the Guild Chapel, the last school founded by Edward VI., as we learn from Strype. We know, approximately, the trend of his studies, for he would read those authors usually read in the Grammar Schools of the period. Professor Baynes has given this subject much study, and we can hardly quarrel with his conclusions. Under the successive mastership of Walter Roche and Thomas Hunt, young Shakespeare doubtless thumbed his Corderius daily ; he acquired a colloquial familiarity with Latin ; he construed the *Tristia* and *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, the *Offices* and *Epistles* of Cicero. According to Rowe, he left school about 1578, in which case he was hardly fifteen years of age. But his abilities, I take it, equalled those of other men his contemporaries, who were graduates at a like age ; and ere he quitted the school he would probably enough taste the choicest classic comedies—perhaps even “scurril” Plautus, as Milton calls him—and “Attic tragedies of stateliest and most regal argument.” The critics—“Baconian” and otherwise—lay stress upon the “little Latin and less Greek” with which he was credited by Ben Jonson. But Jonson compared him, perhaps, with courtly scholars whom he had known, some of whom were classical pedants, with loads of learned lumber in their heads.

SHAKESPEARE

Means of education, other than scholastic, were not lacking to quick-witted youths who lived in Stratford and its neighbourhood during the reign of Elizabeth. As Emerson says, we send our children to school, but they educate themselves at the shop windows. In other words, when Shakespeare was "a boy with sunshine on his brow," he would learn much from the observation of life's common round in his native town. Writers have searched diligently among old records to learn the surroundings of Shakespeare's early life. Those records, as I have hinted, throw but little light on the boy, but much has been ascertained concerning his environment. Mr. Sidney Lee, in his chapter on Domestic and School Discipline, refers to the sixteenth century "Books of Nurture," and to the manners and customs which they reveal. It was deemed fit and proper in Elizabethan days for lads to rise at six o'clock, to assist in the preparation of meals, to wait on their parents at table, and to behave with due reverence in their presence. In a subsequent chapter Mr. Lee writes of the occupations of lads in Stratford. The laws relating to apprenticeship were very stringent. The apprentice was to be within doors by nine o'clock at night; he was forbidden to wear a sword, or to "tipple at the alehouses." Other lads were attached to the homesteads of country

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

gentlemen : they could hunt, wrestle, dance, or shoot with the bow ; they were practised in the management of hawk and hound. The games which they played are for the most part played to-day : they whipped tops ; they played hide and seek ; they rejoiced in leap-frog ; they were learned in the technicalities of coursing and cock-fighting ; like Gray and his companies in later times, they "urged the flying ball." All these recreations are, I think, alluded to by Shakespeare. Transgressions were severely punished, either at home or elsewhere. Breaches of the bye-laws led to disgrace in the stocks. For offences against paternal or scholastic authority the rod was exercised with a severity hardly equalled, many decades afterwards, by Keate at Eton, or by the terrible "Jimmy Boyer" of Christ's Hospital.

Aubrey, after repeating the tradition that John Shakespeare was a butcher, states that William, as a boy, assisted his father, and tells how, "when he kill'd a calf, he would doe it in high style, and make a speech ! " At this point even the channels of tradition run almost dry. The year of his admittance to the Grammar School synchronizes very nearly with his father's chief-aldermanship ; the Corporation seem to have gladly patronised the strolling players of the day, as we know

SHAKESPEARE

by records of money paid to them at several times, and, as Professor Dowden says, the boy "may have been taken to see the entertainment at the Guildhall." He is thought to have witnessed miracle plays at Coventry, and to have watched the players at Kenilworth in 1575 ; but all is conjecture. Nor is the veil lifted on his leaving school. Malone, judging from the legal knowledge so apparent in the plays, thought it probable that Shakespeare laboured awhile in a lawyer's office, of which there were several in Stratford ; Aubrey believed that he taught in a country school. Nor do we touch firmer ground until, some time before 1582, we find Shakespeare mastered by that passion of love which he was afterwards to portray with such inimitable skill.

In the quiet hamlet of Shottery, about a mile from the town of Stratford, stands the old house known as Anne Hathaway's Cottage. "The air smells wooingly here." You may still see this cottage, which William Winter journeyed from Staten Island to visit, standing on sloping ground beside a willow-shaded brook ; "over its porches, and all along its picturesque, irregular front, and on its thatched roof, the woodbine and the ivy climb, and there are wild roses and the maiden's blush." The present writer cherishes very pleasant memories of this historic home. I saw it

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

first on a summer morning, having strolled out of Stratford by the footpath across the fields. As I leaned over the little bridge near the cottage a tiny girl offered me a sprig of lavender from Anne Hathaway's garden. I have that lavender still ; I shall keep it to the end. The flagged and cobbled path before the cottage is bordered with box ; a fine net has been closely drawn over the thatched roof to preserve its straws from the birds, who would fain use them in the building of their "procreant cradle." The garden is surely haunted by the spirits of Perdita and Ophelia ; for the flowers they loved bloom profusely here. Mrs. Baker, a descendant of the Hathaways, who loved the place so dearly and delighted to display its treasures, died a few years ago. But the interior is still shown, by sanction of the "Trustees and Guardians of Shakespeare's Birthplace"—the old chair in the corner, near the "bacon-cupboard," the old Bible, the old bedstead upstairs in "Anne Hathaway's Bedroom." The cottage has been photographed and sketched from every available standpoint. The artist has gone farther : and most of us know that picture which shows us Shakespeare seated near the window of small, leaded panes, with his hand in the hand of Anne Hathaway.

Our knowledge of Anne Hathaway is meagre indeed. Three families bearing

SHAKESPEARE

this surname lived in the neighbourhood in Shakespeare's day. A Richard Hathaway is known to have lived in this cottage, when it was rather a substantial yeoman's home. Three daughters sur-



ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE

vived him, the eldest of whom bore the name of Agnes—a name, as Dr. Windle puts it, “interchangeable at that period with that of Anne.” Tradition, with more than common persistence, tells us that this woman was the Anne Hathaway whom Shakespeare came hither to woo. Moreover, very probably she was related to that “Richard Hathway” who was employed by Henslowe as a collaborating

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dramatist, and who acted in 1599 at the Rose Theatre. She was eight years older than her lover.

On November 28, 1582, two men of Shottery—Falk Sandelles and John Richardson—attested a licence for the marriage of William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway, which is now in the Registry at Worcester. Where the wedding was solemnized we do not know: perhaps at Luddington, perhaps at Temple Grafton, perhaps at Billesley. All three are neighbouring villages, and much has been written to favour the claims of each. Nor do we know the house to which Shakespeare took his bride, although it was certainly in Stratford or its immediate neighbourhood. A daughter, Susannah, was born in the following May; in February 1585 were born the twins Hamnet and Judith—the Judith Shakespeare of William Black's romance. Their father had not yet attained his majority.

Rowe, who first penned a narrative of the poet's life, tells us that during this period Shakespeare fell into loose company; that he and his associates frequently stole deer; that they robbed a park belonging to "Sir Thomas Lucy, of Charlote, near Stratford." Perhaps Shakespeare shared Andrew Boorde's opinion that venison is a "lordes dysshe," but doubted their right to its monopoly. The story runs that he was

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prosecuted for the trespass ; Archdeacon Davies, Vicar of Sapperton, who died in 1708, had heard that he was whipped. The doggerel verses—a “rough pasquinalade,” as Washington Irving calls them—said to have been fixed on the gate at Charlecote to avenge their author, may be dismissed as spurious. But the story is of too romantic a flavour to be readily relinquished. Scott, who visited Charlecote in 1828, was told that the poaching was done in a neighbouring park, where Sir Thomas resided at the time of the trespass. “The tradition went,” he wrote in his journal, “that they hid the buck in a barn, part of which was standing a few years ago, but now totally destroyed.” Artists have been attracted by the story, and one of the best known pictures relating to the poet is that by Brooks, entitled “Shakespeare before Sir Thomas Lucy.” The picture is now in the Memorial.

Three prominent companies of actors are known to have visited Stratford in 1587. The company under the patronage of Leicester included three Stratford men, Burbage, Greene, and Heminge—Greene is remembered for his bitter allusions to Shakespeare in his “Groatsworth of Wit.” Apparently these visits of the players were the turning-point in Shakespeare’s life, for about this time he quitted Stratford—to

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become a player and a playwright ; to create Hamlet and Lear and Othello ; to acquire his right, as the greatest among those who “of the past are all that cannot pass away,” to the loftiest of all niches in the Temple of Fame.

Of the life of Shakespeare in London this is no place to write. Even were it otherwise there would be little enough to record. We trace his career by the licensing of his plays ; moreover, some of them are named in the *Palladis Tamia* of Meres (1598) ; beyond this, and a few such traditions as gather around immortal names, our knowledge is so small that we must say, in the last words of Hamlet, “the rest is silence.” It is pleasant to read that he probably visited his home at Stratford every year ; and to think that here he perhaps wrote portions of his plays. In the old Hall at Rowington, hard by, he is believed to have written “As You Like It.” We know that he suffered and was strong. The year 1596 was especially one of sorrow, for in August he mourned the loss of his son Hamnet. The death of John Shakespeare is recorded in the burial register of Stratford, under date September 8, 1601 ; seven years later Mary Shakespeare followed her husband to the grave. Soon afterwards, as seems probable, Shakespeare himself retired to Stratford, to rest from his many labours, and, as Lowell puts it,

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“lean over his gate to chat and bandy quips with his neighbours.” At New Place—presently to be mentioned—he entertained Jonson and Drayton early in April 1616; a fever ensued, and he died, as is commonly believed, on the anniversary of his birth. He was fifty-two years of age; he had crowded an eternity into a span. I shall revert, in the third section of this book, to the properties which he had acquired, and to the many existing memorials which perpetuate his connection with Stratford.

What did Shakespeare owe to Stratford? Much every way. As Dr. Furnivall puts it, Stratford gave Shakespeare “his outdoor woodland life, his clowns’ play . . . Puck’s fairy lore, the cowslips tall, the red-hipt bumble bees, Oberon’s bank.” To his childhood, spent in a district that still cherished its old wives’ fables, its primitive superstitions, its belief in the reality of unseen things, we owe not only the “*Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” but the “*Tempest*,” the “*Winter’s Tale*,” and “*As You Like It*,” with all their words of wisdom and imperishable play of fancy. More directly, as some of us love to think, he wrote plays as a man because he had wistfully watched the players as a boy. As Gibbon, just two centuries after Shakespeare’s birth, conceived the great work of his life while watching the bare-footed

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friars at vespers in the Temple of Jupiter, so perhaps Shakespeare, when listening to the players at Stratford or Kenilworth, may have dreamed that he would himself write for those who "hold, as 't were, the mirror up to nature," and would do so in such manner as to make men the wiser for his work.

"Nothing is here for tears." Shakespeare died, as he must surely have wished to die, before the infirmities of age had laid hold upon him, while yet supreme master of every faculty of his wonderful intellect. Men of letters in each succeeding generation have revered his name. "I loved the man," wrote Ben Jonson, "and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any." To Milton, he was "my Shakespeare," who had reared to himself a monument which kings might envy ; to Scott, one whose "brogues" he was not worthy to tie ; to Coleridge, "our myriad-minded Shakespeare ;" to Lowell, "at once the greatest of poets, and so unnoticeable a good citizen as to leave no incidents for biography." Surely, as quaint John Earle wrote in a different connection, Shakespeare was "a scholar in this great university, the world ; and the same his book of study. . . . He knit his observations together, and made a ladder of them all to climb to God." The greatest of men born within

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“ This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,”

his fellow-countrymen to-day are no inheritors of unfulfilled renown, but the followers of one who achieved his full and perfect work, and whose name has gone out unto all the earth.



CHAPTER III

MEMORIALS

WASHINGTON IRVING has recorded how at the Red Horse in Stratford he dreamed, in the night watches, of Shakespeare, the Jubilee, and David Garrick. His was no singular experience ; we are poor indeed if a visit to Stratford evokes no precious memories. Here, if anywhere in central England, we exclaim with Byron, "Where'er we tread 'tis haunted, holy ground." For in Stratford and its neighbourhood stand many memorials. If you approach the town from Blisworth, as so many do, the train traverses a long stretch of diversified country, passing near Edge Hill of famous memory, before you see the Philips Obelisk on the hilltop behind Welcombe Lodge—a home of the nephew and biographer of Macaulay—and presently catch a glimpse of Stratford in the hollow towards the south. Then the train crosses the bridge that spans the Avon ; before you is the Church of the Holy Trinity ; beyond, close to the waterside, the tower of the Shakespeare



The
Memorial
Theatre
Stratford-on
Avon

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Memorial “stands up and takes the morning.”

Ben Jonson, in his lines facing the Droeshout portrait prefixed to the first folio of 1623, advised readers to regard the works rather than the picture of Shakespeare. Milton, in his first published verses, in turn prefixed to the second folio of 1632, declared that Shakespeare needed no monument of “piled stones.” Nearly three centuries have passed since Shakespeare’s death ; monuments to his memory have been reared in other lands than ours ; portraits, more or less conjectural,—the “Droeshout,” “Felton,” “Zoust,” “Jansen,” and others,—are carefully cherished. The house in which he was born, and that which in part preserves the figure of the house where he died, are visited almost daily by many pilgrims, who visit also his grave in the parish church. Mr. Sidney Lee mentions that in 1896 the birthplace was visited by 27,038 persons, of over forty nationalities. So frequently do Americans come to these Stratford shrines that separate books are reserved for their signatures. This spirit of reverence is surely “sweet and commendable in our nature”; the town is small indeed, but in the eyes of good and true lovers of literature it contains “infinite riches in a little room.”

In truth, from the death of Shakespeare, the story of Stratford is largely concerned

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with the efforts of her townsmen and others to perpetuate his memory. Three days after his death he was laid to rest in the church of his childhood, just inside the altar rails, in the second grave from the north wall. That grave does not bear his name ; instead, you may still read the four strange lines attributed to his own pen :—

GOOD FREND FOR IESVS SAKE FORBEARE,
TO DIG THE DVST ENCLOASED HEARE :

R T
BLESTE BE Y MAN Y SPARES THES STONES,
T
AND CVRST BE HE Y MOVES MY BONES.

Those bones, as Washington Irving was assured, have never been moved. Once, when the grave was exposed during some excavations, the sexton watched over it jealously ; he told Irving that he had peered into it, but saw neither coffin nor bones—"nothing but dust." At the poet's funeral the great bell of the church was tolled ; rosemary—"there's rosemary, that's for remembrance"—was strewn upon his grave. Some time before his friends Heminge and Condell issued the first folio edition of his collected plays, there was placed, in a recess in the north wall of the chancel, that bust which still looks down upon his grave.

According to Dugdale, the bust of

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Shakespeare was executed by Gerard Jansen (Johnson). That it was executed before 1623 is evident from the lines, by Leonard Digges, prefixed to the First Folio, for there was certainly no other "Stratford monument" to which those lines could have referred :—

" Shake-speare, at length thy pious fellowes give
The world thy workes ; thy works, by which,
outlive
Thy Tombe, thy name must when that stone
is rent
And Time dissolves thy Stratford moniment."

It has been asserted that Johnson modelled the bust from a mask taken after the poet's death ; the assertion is plausible, but there is, I believe, no contemporary evidence to support it. The external appearance of the bust has been often changed. Originally coloured to a life-like resemblance, it was repainted in 1748, money for the purpose being provided by the profits from "Othello," acted that year by strolling players at Stratford. In 1793 it was cleaned and painted white at the instigation of Malone, whose transgression lives for ever in the pages of Lamb. Readers will remember Lamb's indignant outburst in the *London Magazine*, July 1822, subsequently reprinted in the "Last Essays of Elia." "The wretched Malone . . . bribed the sexton of Stratford Church to let him whitewash the painted effigy of old Shak-

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speare, which stood there, in rude but lively fashion depicted, to the very colour of the cheek, the eye, the eyebrow, hair, the very dress he used to wear—the only authentic testimony we had, however imperfect, of those curious parts and parcels of him. They covered him over with a coat of white paint. By —, if I had been a Justice of Peace for Warwickshire, I would have clapt both commentator and sexton fast in the stocks, for a pair of meddling, sacrilegious varlets.” Lamb was not the only person who expressed his resentment in writing; twelve years before, some lines, often quoted, had been written in the visitor’s book in Holy Trinity Church :—

“Stranger to whom this Monument is shewn,
Invoke the Poet’s curse upon Malone,
Whose meddling zeal his barbarous taste betrays
And smears his tombstone as he marr’d his plays.”

In 1861 the bust was renovated by Simon Collins, who, finding traces of the original colouring, succeeded in partly reproducing it, though he probably brought its faults rather than its merits into strong relief. It has never been disputed that this bust, executed and placed here so soon after the poet’s death, has strong claims to be regarded as an authentic likeness of Shakespeare.

Above the bust is the coat-of-arms granted to his father in 1596; beneath are those

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Latin lines which compare his sagacity to that of Nestor, his intellect to that of Socrates, his skill to that of Virgil. The bust was probably executed at the request of Shakespeare's daughter, Susannah, and her husband, Dr. John Hall. To Susannah, Shakespeare had bequeathed, *inter alia*, the house known as New Place ; to his daughter Judith, one hundred pounds as a marriage portion ; to the poor of Stratford, ten pounds.

It has been ascertained, only too surely, that the family of Shakespeare became extinct in 1670. His wife died in 1623, and was buried by his side. His grandchild, Elizabeth Hall, was married first to Thomas Nash of Stratford and afterwards to Mr. Barnard of Abington ; but she died childless. His daughter Judith, who married Thomas Quiney, lived for thirty-six years in what is now the Shakespeare-Quiney House, at the corner of High Street and Bridge Street, and which still retains some ancient oaken beams. Her three sons died while of tender years ; consequently the poet's grandchild at the time of her death was the last of the family. Dr. John Hall, who married Susannah Shakespeare in 1607, lived awhile in the Old Town, probably in the house now called Hall's Croft ; but after June 1616, when he proved Shakespeare's will in London, he removed to New Place.

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There, in 1635, he died, and was buried the next day in the chancel of the parish church, of which he had been sidesman and warden, and to which he had presented a pulpit. At New Place, in 1643, as Dugdale records, Hall's widow entertained Queen Henrietta Maria, then journeying to meet King Charles at Edge Hill.

The story of New Place is too long to narrate; but I note in passing some points of interest. Shakespeare, as I have mentioned, was at New Place when he died; probably his wife died there also. The old house built by Sir Hugh Clopton was purchased in 1563 by one Bott, a lawyer and alderman of Stratford; Bott in 1567 sold it to William Underhill. Thirty years afterwards Shakespeare, a shareholder in the Blackfriars and Globe Theatres, bought the "Great House," as it was then called; for the house and adjacent barns and gardens he paid sixty pounds. To this property he presently added about one hundred and forty acres of neighbouring land, and his purchase, in 1605, of the unexpired lease of tithes in Stratford, Bishopston, and Welcombe, rendered him one of the richest men in the town. He found the Great House in ruinous condition, and rebuilt it in the following year, naming it New Place. Apparently it was inhabited for some years by Thomas Greene, who claimed

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cousinship with its owner ; but Shakespeare himself lived in it after his retirement to Stratford. The old home in Henley Street was probably his occasional residence between his father's death and his own removal to New Place. The present house, purchased by subscription in 1861 for the Trustees and Guardians of Shakespeare's Birthplace, contains a small museum, and an ancient shovel-board, for many years in the adjacent Falcon Tavern.

The garden adjoining New Place shows much that is interesting. Here Rogers might have found further inspiration for his "Pleasures of Memory." Some foundations of the old house are preserved, fenced off from the footpath ; they can be overlooked from the lawn, or viewed more closely on application at New Place. Here is "Shakespeare's Well" ; here, too, stood the famous mulberry tree, planted, as the tradition runs, by Shakespeare himself. A man of substance when he built New Place, we may well imagine him a hospitable host, one who loved his friends, and gathered many a convivial company around him here. He would make his garden a very pleasant resort. Fancy pictures him beneath his mulberry tree with Jonson and Drayton, or playing a merry game at bowls, of which he was probably as fond as Drake himself. "Doubtless," says Leigh Hunt, "he divided his time be-

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tween his books, his bowling-green, and his daughter Susannah." The destruction of the mulberry tree by the Rev. Francis Gastrell has been related with contradictory details. It appears, however, that it was certainly cut down by his orders because so many persons came to see it. This was about 1757 ; soon afterwards he demolished the house itself and sold the materials. The fallen mulberry tree was bought by one Thomas Sharp, who fashioned many curios from its timbers, which were eagerly purchased. A second tree was planted on the same site, and was followed in turn by a third, which still puts forth leaves in its season.

Here, as he himself records, came William Winter when the streets of Stratford were "deserted and silent under the star-lit sky" ; and here he remained long in meditation, gazing into the enclosed garden. The grounds are now carefully tended ; here are multitudes of pansies "for thoughts," and of other flowers named in the plays of Shakespeare. Its walks are shaded by fir, pine, yew, cupressus, and African cedar. I have lingered in this garden as the afternoon waned, at that hour when, as William Watson sings,

"the westering daylight reels aghast,
In conflagrations of red overthrow ;"

and "smale foules," as Chaucer calls them, are busy with their evening hymns. At

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the far end of the grounds is a column, once part of "the first Town Hall in Stratford-upon-Avon." It stands close to the Memorial and the riverside. From here, as one writer puts it, "the funeral



SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHPLACE

train of Shakespeare, on that dark day when it moved . . . to Stratford Church, had but a little way to go."

We grope among dim traditions and fragmentary records in our endeavours to trace the cherishing of Shakespeare's memory in his native town. Many decades passed before Stratford folk quite realised the full stature of the poet who

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had lived and moved among their sires. The house in Henley Street was long neglected. Engravings of that tenement are before me as I write ; they record its external appearance in 1769, 1788, 1807, 1824, 1856, and 1864 ; its aspect to-day is shown in Mr. New's drawing. The earliest of these engravings is from a sketch sent to the *Gentleman's Magazine* by a townsman of Stratford, in view of the Jubilee then soon to be celebrated. The sender described it as an "exact drawing," by his friend Mr. Greene, of the house which, according to "undoubted tradition," saw the nativity of Shakespeare. That house, in mere configuration and in the disposition of its larger timbers, still stands ; but even in 1769 it must have known many minor alterations since, in 1552, John Shakespeare was fined for permitting a dunghill (*sterquinarium*) to accumulate before his doorway. We know that in 1556 he purchased the house adjoining his own ; this, for purposes of distinction, has been called the Wool-shop. Soon after his death it became an inn, known as the "Maidenhead" ; subsequently its sign was altered to the "Swan and Maidenhead" ; early last century the word "Swan" was again omitted. The adjoining tenement, the birthplace itself, was bequeathed by the poet to his sister Joan : "Item, . . . I doe will and devise

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unto her the house with the appurtenances in Stratford, wherein she dwelleth, for her naturall lief——” at the yearly rent of twelve pence ! Many times it changed owners ere, as the old prints testify, it became a butcher’s shop. Late in the eighteenth century, its occupant announced, on a board above his shop window, that his house was the birthplace of William Shakespeare; later, the inscription ran—“The immortal Shakespeare was born in this house.” At length, in 1847, the entire tenement was advertised for sale. By the formation of Committees in Stratford and London, and by a careful fostering of the Homeric custom of presenting gifts, the property was eventually purchased as a national memorial for the sum of three thousand pounds.

In this house, in a room upstairs, thousands of signatures have been scribbled by visitors to the birthplace of Shakespeare. Some who bore those names, which you can still decipher, were themselves no mean competitors in what Mr. Swinburne has called “the race for the first seat beneath Shakespeare’s.” Walton, Byron, and Scott ; Thackeray, Carlyle, Dickens ; Tennyson, Kean, Helen Faucit, and many others have stood here, surely with thoughts that lay too deep for tears. As is very meet and right, no effort has been made to garnish the room with ancient or modern

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trumpery ; there are two or three carved chairs and, upon a low table, a bust of Shakespeare. The adjoining apartment, converted into a library, and the museum below, are to some of still greater interest. Here is the Ely Palace portrait ; a fine copy of the first folio ; Richard Quiney's famous letter to his "Loveinge good Ffrend and Contreymann Mr. Wm. Shackespere," written from the "Bell in Carter Lane," on October 25, 1598 ; many choice engravings and rare documents ; and, of value far above rubies, several "first quartos" and sumptuous editions of single or collected plays :—

" . . . how fair the bindings shine ;
Prose cannot tell them what I feel—
The books that never can be mine ! "

Here, as elsewhere in the town, some of the most interesting documents and engravings are those relating to the Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769.

The year 1769—famous in history for the births of Wellington, Napoleon, and Cuvier—was long remembered in Stratford. The Town Hall had just been rebuilt, at the corner of Chapel Street and Sheep Street, and Garrick had accepted the freedom of the town. He presented to the Corporation that masterpiece, his portrait by Gainsborough, and undertook to

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direct a public festival in honour of Shakespeare. A pavilion was erected on the Bank-Croft, near where the Memorial now stands ; "almost every man of eminence in the literary world," as Boswell assures us, "was happy to partake in this festival of genius." On September 6, 7, and 8 all Stratford kept holiday. Early in the morning of the first day there was masquerading and firing of cannon ; the Corporation breakfasted together, and presently Arne's Oratorio of "Judith" was rendered in the church by the orchestra from Drury Lane. On the following day the "Dedication Ode," written by Garrick and set to music by Arne, was listened to in the pavilion ; and there was a masquerade of Shakespearean characters in the Town Hall. Next evening the Jubilee concluded with a ball, when Mrs. Garrick, "the best of women and wives," danced a minuet.

Boswell, who had just published his book on Corsica, came to Stratford on this occasion "in honour of Shakespeare." As Macaulay puts it, "he exhibited himself to all the crowd that filled Stratford-on-Avon with a placard around his hat bearing the inscription of Corsica Boswell." Johnson, much to Boswell's regret, was at Bright-helmstone with the Thrales, but was ludicrously quoted at the Jubilee. A haberdasher of the town, who sold "Shake-

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spearean ribands," of many colours, advertised his wares with a line from Johnson's prologue at the opening of Drury Lane Theatre—

" Each change of *many-coloured* life he drew."

Even a haberdasher can quote poetry for his purpose.

Garrick thought Stratford a dirty town ; as well he might, for during his visit the rains descended, the Avon overflowed its banks, and the neighbourhood of the pavilion became a quagmire. Indeed, the weather was so unpropitious that local worthies who, as Miranda or Mistress Quickly, as Lear or Macbeth, were to have strutted their hour in masquerade before Shakespeare's birthplace, had to relinquish their project. Garrick seems to have visited at the old inn, so quaint and homely, that now bears his name ; it stands in the High Street, adjoining the Harvard House. We know, however, that he lodged at the Red Horse in Bridge Street—immortalised by Washington Irving in his "Sketch Book." After such rambles as will live whilst memory lasts, I have at times retired to the Garrick Inn to think upon what I have seen. In the morning I have lingered at the open window to breathe the sweet air of the Avon valley, to watch the life of the High Street, and

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to note where the statue of Shakespeare, the gift of Garrick, looks down upon Sheep Street from a niche on the Town Hall. At such moments I have wondered whether in the archives of some old home, perhaps in Warwickshire itself, there may yet lie, unknown to its owners, some manuscript narrative of Shakespeare's life at Stratford. "Thereby hangs a tale." Disraeli records that Oldys, the antiquary, who lay long in the Fleet Prison, promised to furnish Walker, a bookseller in the Strand, with an account of Shakespeare's life during ten years—years of which previous biographers had recorded nothing. Oldys, however, died without performing his promise; probably no man will ever perform it in his stead.

I have mentioned the Harvard House. A quaint structure, with curiously carved barge-boards and corbels, it was built in 1596 by an alderman of Stratford, named Thomas Rogers. In 1605 his daughter Katherine was wedded to Robert Harvard of Southwark; their son John, born in 1607, graduated at Cambridge. He married with the daughter of a Sussex parson, sailed presently to New England, and founded that university which bears his name, and whose sons have never lacked scholarly appreciation of the plays and poems of Shakespeare, or wanted a warm welcome in the old home—although, as

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Lowell once wrote, their ancestors did their best to make them strangers by seeking a new home in New England two hundred and fifty years ago.

“Return we to our story.” During the season following the Jubilee at least twelve of Shakespeare’s plays were performed in London, either at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane or at Covent Garden. In fact, since Betterton had personated Hamlet and Cibber had altered Richard the Third to his fancy, Shakespeare had been acted in London with increasing frequency. But no permanent theatre was built in Stratford before 1827. In that year a theatre, standing off Chapel Lane, in the garden of New Place, was opened with a performance of “Hamlet.” Garrick, as is well known, suggested that a school of dramatic art should be established at Stratford; the closing of New Place Theatre more than a century afterwards was one of the first steps towards the approximate realisation of Garrick’s wish. We learn from an old playbill that as far back as 1820 such a project was seriously entertained; it was indeed laid before the audience after a performance at the temporary theatre in Stratford. But nothing was done for many years. In 1864 the Tercentenary of Shakespeare’s birth was celebrated: a huge pavilion was erected; the voice of Sims Reeves was heard in the

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“Messiah,” and Trench preached in the parish church. Some years later, by the generosity of Mr. C. E. Flower, a fund was started for the erection of a permanent monument, and on April 23, 1877, three hundred and thirteen years after the poet’s birth, was laid the foundation-stone of the Shakespeare Memorial.

To describe that Memorial—its theatre, its library, its picture-gallery—would be to compile a catalogue of treasures rich and rare—a catalogue which you may purchase for twopence in the building. No aspect of the poet’s genius has been overlooked—“tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral . . . scene indivisable, or poem unlimited” are remembered, as they have been since those early days when most of the plays were acted here. But a year or two back Mr. F. R. Benson superintended the performing of the historical plays in due sequence: the long line of English statesmen and kings, of English prelates and fair women passed before us in something more than inexplicable dumb show, and “all the burial places of the memory gave up their dead.” Here are some ten thousand volumes, mostly concerned with the life, works, or critics of Shakespeare: here such pictures as Fuseli’s Witches, Fradelle’s Othello, and Herrick’s Rosalind show how deeply the artist may enter into the spirit of the dramatist whom he desires to illustrate. To

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me, at least, the crowning triumph of the whole is the statuary in the adjacent gardens, wrought in bronze at the direction of Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower. It shows us the figures of Lady Macbeth, Hamlet, Prince Hal, and Falstaff—embodiments of tragedy, philosophy, history, and comedy ; above, Shakespeare is seated with pen in hand and thought upon his brow, looking down upon that world in which, perhaps unconsciously, he had sought out, with many inventions, “a path to perpetuity of fame.”



CHAPTER IV

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

THE town of Stratford contains so many shrines, so much of old-world charm in nook and corner, that one feels at times loath to wander farther afield. But neighbouring villages should be visited; there we taste the large air of the old forests of Feldon and Arden, and overlook what Speed described as another Eden. If we feel no interest in the church that has looked down upon the village for so many centuries, or in the thatched cottages that flank the winding road, we have at least leisure for a little retrospect: we may learn, as Mr. Henry James learned near Dijon, how the vision of things we have enjoyed may become more distinct.

Visitors to Stratford, in the early autumn, may watch the pea-pickers at work in the surrounding fields. Many acres of peas are cultivated in the neighbourhood, and the harvesting of them affords employment to men, women, and children alike, who pick and bag the peas for the London market. Many of these toilers of the field, like the hop-pickers, work for the same

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employer year after year ; but others are wayside waifs and strays—wreckage strewn hither and thither on the shores of life. They ramble from village to village, passing much of their time in enforced idleness, for their many employments only afford labour at certain seasons. Often enough, after the heat and burden of the day, they sleep under the nearest hedge, or squander their scant earnings in the wayside inn. Often, too, you may see a group of them lying asleep on the bank, even in the hottest sunshine ; indeed, exposure in the wind and rain and sun has tanned them a deep brown. They have not yet ceased to wonder when they see that modern miracle, the motor-car ; you see them stand up and, shading their eyes, watch its progress till it is lost in the distance. If you speak to them of aught that lies outside their experience they appear greatly astonished ; their gestures reminding one of that habit of Flaubert's, who, when anything unusual occurred, was wont to spread his hands dramatically and exclaim, “It is immense !”

It is best to ramble among the surrounding villages at random, as inclination prompts. You need not tell them all “according to the scrip,” as Peter Quince named the “rude mechanicals” in his house near Athens ; but may ignore the guide-books, and follow where the sweet Warwickshire lanes and bypaths lead you. Thus shall you

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often tread in the footsteps of Shakespeare, and wander into villages which he must certainly have known. In springtime, and throughout the summer, the waysides around Stratford are bright with a hundred flowers that Shakespeare knew, and vocal with the songs of birds which he loved as perhaps no English poet, except Chaucer, had loved them before.

Somervile, in the first canto of his "Hobbinol, or the Rural Games," refers to the wealth of flowers hereabouts :—

" Avona pours
Her kindly Torrent on the thirsty Glebe,
And pillages the Hills t'enrich the Plains;
On whose luxuriant banks Flowers of all hues
Start up spontaneous; and the teeming Soil
With hasty shoots prevents its Owner's Pray'r."

This feature of the district is brought to the notice of visitors in the town itself. From those windows in Shakespeare's Birthplace that look towards the north, you may overlook a carefully stocked flower-garden, very pleasing to the eye. It can show, indeed, an infinite variety of plants, displaying, as far as possible, all the flowers mentioned by Shakespeare. Botanists have pointed out how large a number of those flowers are found in Warwickshire. To the rich flora in the Avon valley we owe some of the sweetest passages in Shakespeare's plays. Who can doubt that the pleasant places—the lanes,

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the fields, the cottage gardens—of his youth, so bright with blossom, were in his mind's eye when he wrote, for instance, the fourth act of “*The Winter's Tale*”? There, on a lawn before a shepherd's cottage, Perdita,

“no shepherdess, but Flora,
Peering in April's front,”

takes rosemary and rue from Dorcas, and presently talks of carnations, and “streak'd gillevors”; of lavender, mint, savory, marjoram; of marigolds and daffodils; of violets

“——sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath ;”

of primroses, oxlips, and the crown-imperial; of “lilies of all kinds.” And why does Perdita say that with such flowers in her hands she feels like a player in a Whitsun-pastoral? Because at Stratford, as elsewhere, Whitsuntide dances and floral games and pageants, in which both sexes took part, were held around the May-pole, and on such occasions, probably enough, the creator of Perdita had often “made himself a motley to the view.”

Some of these Warwickshire villages are associated in the annals of literature with bards whose verses are now seldom read. And yet their lives are not without interest. As we take down from an upper shelf our Shenstone or Somerville,

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and once again glance at “The School-mistress” or “The Chace,” the love of old rhyme waxes strong within us; we renew the old enthusiasms; we go back in thought to the days when, like Thoreau, we essayed to read Chalmer’s English Poets without skipping. Snitterfield, already mentioned in these pages, had its own parson-poet, who fraternized with poets of greater repute, whose lives were chronicled by Johnson. Richard Jago (1715–1781) was ordained curate of Snitterfield in 1737, and preached for many years in the church where Shakespeare’s grandsire must have worshipped. A Warwickshire man, born at Beaudesert near Henley-in-Arden, he was at school with Shenstone at Solihul, near by; Somerville, too, was a common friend. The friendship of Shenstone and Jago was sincere and life-long. They exchanged visits; they corrected each other’s verses; they scribbled together in Dodsley’s Miscellany. One of Jago’s most successful efforts was an elegy, entitled “The Blackbirds,” which appeared in Hawksworth’s “Adventurer.” “Your Blackbird,” wrote Shenstone, “excels any singing bird I ever heard, and I beseech you to convey it to the Leasowes by the next opportunity, that he may acquire fame near other rills, and in other valleys, than those in which he was produced.” At the Leasowes, at Hales Owen

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near Birmingham, where Shenstone laid out his grounds in fantastic fashion, Jago, like Thomson, was a visitor; the three poets being devoted worshippers of Priapus, the God of Gardens. Shenstone wrote frequently to Jago and other literary friends. From his letters, which Dodsley published, we learn that when in London he saw Quin as Falstaff in 1740; that he saw Cibber as Parolles; that he witnessed "The Merry Wives of Windsor," and that the very "black-shoe boys cried up the Genius of Shakespeare." Such letters must have afforded pleasant reading in the neighbourhood of Stratford. The vicarage where Jago dwelt, and the church near by, are beautifully situated on a wooded hill. Jago did much to render his home "more beautiful than beauty's self"; his daughters planted birch trees on the lawn: these were long known as The Three Ladies, but were recently blown down. The house has been rebuilt; but the church, shaded by limes, is still unmarred, and a slab to Jago's memory is preserved in the vestry. He lies in the vault which he himself prepared, beneath the central aisle. Hundreds who never before heard his name have read his verses in New Place Gardens, inscribed on an iron plate and fastened to a large stone from the house where Shakespeare died.

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One poem of Jago's transfers our thoughts to the memory of sterner issues. "My friend Jago," wrote Shenstone to Graves, "has written another Poem, . . . which he calls Edge-hill. It is descriptive chiefly of the prospect—but admits an account of the fight there." From Snitterfield we ramble towards the south-east to Kineton, and thence to Edge Hill. It suffices here to remark that the battle was fought on October 23, 1642; its details, so far as they are known, are well summarised in Dr. Windle's "Shakespeare's Country." Dr. Windle, however, repeats Denzil's assertion that Cromwell failed to take part in the engagement, but does not mention that this is flatly contradicted by Carlyle. "Captain Cromwell *was* present, and did his duty, let angry Denzil say what he will." Victory was claimed on both sides; so Richard Baxter's hope that one battle would suffice was not realised. Charles unfurled his standard at a spot now marked by Radway Tower, near a brook of the same name; the fight, though undecided, was fierce, and as the king drew off his forces at sunset the bells were announcing evensong from the tower of Radway Church. The story runs, plausibly enough, that some of the wounded were carried to die in Stratford.

Reference to the "Shakespeare villages" can hardly be omitted here, although the

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story told concerning them comes to us in “questionable shape.” Some time in 1762, as the legend runs, a traveller visited the White Lion Inn in Henley Street. Very naturally, traveller and host chatted together of Shakespeare. Now the poet, as mine host had heard, loved a glass in company, and it chanced that the men of Bidford, like Falstaff, were mighty in their cups. One Saturday Shakespeare strolled into their village. He found the “Bidford Drinkers” absent, but passed some hours very agreeably among the “Sippers.” They taught him to drink deep ere he departed—in fact he was unable to proceed far on his road home, so he presently lay down under a crab-tree by the wayside and fell asleep. When he awoke some men were ploughing in an adjacent field : he asked why they ploughed on Sunday, and learned that Sunday was past and gone. Shakespeare resolved to drink no more in certain villages, and recorded their names in verse—

“ Piping Pebworth, dancing Marston,
Haunted Hillborough, hungry Grafton,
Dadgeing Exhall, papist Wixford,
Beggarly Broom, and drunken Bidford.”

The crab-tree under which the poet slept was long pointed out, less than a mile from Bidford, on the Stratford road : it was cut down in 1824, and fragments are still treasured relics in the neighbourhood. The

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carouse, as tradition states, took place in an old gabled house of stone, then called the Falcon Inn, near Bidford Churchyard, and kept by a man named Norton. The writer, like others, has been shown at the birth-place the sign of the Falcon Inn, once sold to a wheelwright at "beggarly Broom," and bought from him for the museum. The story, thus told to a chance wayfarer in Stratford, spread abroad as stories are wont to do ; it was narrated in the *Gentleman's Magazine* ; it was repeated by Malone. Mr. Salt Brassington assures us it is "very ancient," having passed from man to man long before it was printed. True or false, it is typical of village life three centuries ago. Folk who regard it with repugnance perhaps love a Shakespeare and a Warwickshire of their own creating. "Shakespeare," says Stevenson very justly, "might begin the day upon a quart of ale, and yet enjoy the sunrise to the full as much as Thoreau, and commemorate his enjoyment in vastly better verses." Thoreau, I may explain, drank only water.

Naturally—as I may remark in passing—many of Shakespeare's most fervent admirers have searched his plays zealously for words of protest against the immoderate use of strong drink. One is hardly surprised, when viewing the Memorial Fountain in Rother Street, presented to the town by Mr. G. W. Childs, of Philadelphia,

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in 1887, to read, in one of its recessed arches, Shakespeare's commendation of "honest water which never left man i' th' mire." The Fountain, standing fifty



IN ROTHER STREET

feet high, was designed by Mr. J. A. Cossins of Birmingham; it is, as Mr. Ribton-Turner remarks, "a handsome and imposing structure."

The village of Bidford lies in a pleasant valley, at a spot where the Roman Icknield Way crossed the Avon, near its junction with the river Arrow. Here, in 1482,

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the monks of Alcester built a bridge of stone, of seven arches, in place of the ancient ford across the Avon. Their work still stands ; and on the near slope, by the waterside, stands the church, which contains no monuments of enduring interest. You are shown, however, some silver plate, said to be graven by Spanish hands—the gift of Alicia Leigh, one of the Dudley family, whose castle, near Birmingham, was visited by Jago and Shenstone. Broom, a neighbouring hamlet, consists of a few thatched cottages near the Arrow.

“Dancing Marston,” the Long Marston of modern maps, lies midway between Stratford and Evesham. Fun waxed “fast and furious” here in the good old days ; the morris-dance, then so familiar in the district, perhaps accounts for the word “dancing” in the doggerel verse. There were morris-dancers at Bidford ; indeed, as Mr. Salt Brassington tells us, the pastime still lives, and a troupe is maintained in that village. In old documents Long Marston is referred to as Marston Sicca : we read that the name perhaps had reference to the lack of springs in the district. Hence, as we may suppose, when Shakespeare wished to describe the effects of wind and flood, he remembered the morris dances of Bidford and Marston, and we find Titania telling Oberon that “the nine men’s morris is filled up with mud.”

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More familiar is the story of Charles the Second, who passed some perilous hours at Long Marston after the battle of Worcester. Mr. Allan Fea has recently, with diligence and skill, brought together many scattered fragments of history, and has thrown much light upon this episode in his interesting volume "The Flight of the King." On the night of September 9, 1651, Charles slept at Bentley Hall near Walsall, where arrangements were made for his escape to Bristol. In the morning, his host dressed him in a "suit and cloak of country grey-cloth," put twenty pounds in his pocket and sent him, in charge of several staunch friends, towards Stratford-on-Avon. Passing through Bromsgrove, they rode south-east to Wootton-Wawen. Presently, as the party proceeded in the direction of Snitterfield, by the thoroughfare long known as the King's Lane, they saw in the distance a troop of Cromwell's soldiers. They made a détour in order to avoid them, but later in the day, when fording the Avon below Stratford, they encountered them again, but the king escaped recognition. On reaching Long Marston, Charles was sheltered by Mr. John Tomes, in a fine old house near the main road. Here, as the story runs, the king disguised himself as a menial, and, as "Will Jackson," assisted awkwardly in the kitchen, where he was soundly rated by a

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maid for his clumsiness when handling the roasting-jack. Some narratives state that soldiers actually searched the house whilst Charles was in the kitchen, and that the cook struck "Jackson" on the back with a gravy spoon, thereby diverting their suspicions. The house has been much altered, but it still stands ; an old woman told Mr. Fea that she remembered being shown the room in which the king slept. "The original staircase has now disappeared ; plate-glass is inserted in place of the diamond-paned windows, and the old kitchen is converted into a modern sitting-room." The jack, as Mr. Fea records, was taken to London in 1889 and was shown at the Stuart Exhibition, but is now again at Long Marston, carefully preserved in a glass case. For his loyalty on this occasion, Mr. John Tomes was in part deprived of his property, and compelled to seek a home elsewhere ; but his family was not forgotten when the king came into his own again. At Long Marston, this famous house is still called "Old King Charles," and the wife of its present owner is descended from that stout-hearted Englishman who cared for the Royal fugitive so long ago. But monuments to the Tomes family are sought in vain in Long Marston church, all traces of them having disappeared. There, however, many of that family sleep ; "the trampling of ever new

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generations passes over them, and they hear it not any more for ever."

In a score of other villages near Stratford we find much of interest. Some of them, like Zion of old, are beautiful for situation—dotted irregularly over the hill-side, or lying, a tiny cluster of habitations, in the leafy valley. The neighbourhood of Shottery has unfailing charm ; you approach it from Stratford by meadow pathways, noticing, as you near the village, some ancient cottages that face a tiny, triangular green. The road twists and turns sharply as you approach the bridge near Anne Hathaway's Cottage, and patches of garden hereabouts are bright with blossom. From Shottery, crossing the Alcester road, you may ramble towards Wilmcote, following a lane that crosses high, rolling country, where the marbled-white butterfly flits erratically from flower to flower. Over-head skylarks sing uninterruptedly in the unclouded blue ; below, looking towards the south-east, you catch glimpses of Stratford, and of many miles of undulating pastures in the Avon valley. From Wilmcote you may pursue your ramble to Wootton-Wawen, once a town in the woods, where Somervile, who loved Warwickshire so dearly, lies beneath a plain slab in the parish church.

These villages lie in the old forest of Arden. There is much of interest in the

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whole neighbourhood. From essays biographical and topographical, and from records dusty and dim, we find that every village and every church has incidents in its story which are worth repeating. When at the grave of Somerville we have only to turn to the churchyard to find an inscription to Somerville's huntsman, one John Hoitt. We can now hardly decipher the words of the tombstone itself, but they have been copied and placed inside the church :—

“ Here Hoitt, all his sports and labours past,
Joins his loved Master, Somerville, at last ;
Together went they echoing fields to try,
Together now in silent dust they lie.
Servant and Lord, when once we yield our breath
Huntsman and poet are alike in death.
Life's motley drama calls for powers and men,
Of different casts to fill each changeful scene ;
But all the merit that we falsely prize,
Not in the part, but in the acting lies :
And as the lyre, so may the Huntsman's horn
Fame's trumpet rival, and his name adorn.”

Evidently John Saches, sometime Vicar of Wootton-Wawen, who penned these lines, was no mean hand at the rhyming couplet, so much in vogue in his day. The church in which he preached can still show some old books in chains, monuments of solid, Calvinistic divinity, seldom looked into unless to satisfy a momentary curiosity. From Wootton-Wawen Church a short ramble leads to Edstone Hall, associated

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with a dark chapter in the history of the Somerviles. The present house is a modern structure, but the grounds wear much the same aspect as when the poet himself lived in an older Edstone Hall. His ancestor, John Somerville, whose wife Margaret was a near relative of Robert Arden of Wilmcote, determined to kill Queen Elizabeth. He had political and personal grievances, but it was a mad resolution ; moreover, with too little method in his madness, he talked of his intentions at an inn near Oxford. Arrested and thrown into prison, he was found strangled before the day of his trial. Others were implicated in his misfortunes ; his father-in-law, Edward Arden, was charged with complicity in Somerville's treason, and suffered death about 1584. Biographers have pointed out that this was soon after Shakespeare's marriage, and have suggested that these troubles in the Arden family may have influenced Shakespeare when he determined to try his fortunes in London.

We Englishmen justly boast that the shores of romance reach even to our doorways. For we are an old nation : the story of two thousand years "lives in our annals and looks green in song." The lessons of history may be taken deeply to heart in the neighbourhood of Stratford, which has contributed so largely to its pages. If our literature, as Macaulay thought, is the

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most durable of the many glories of England, this town beside the Avon is surely the roof and crown of things historical, for it gave to our history its greatest name. No memories are so fragrant as those of poesy, nor so potent to restore our lost youth. Here, beside the Avon, where Shakespeare

Went maying in that ancient May
Whose fallen flowers are fragrant yet,

we may be boys or girls again in heart, or we have read to little purpose in the plays and poems of him who sleeps so near the river side. But no attempt has been made in this little book to claim for Stratford a monopoly of interest. I can promise readers a rich harvest if they will study the story of their own homeland. As Mr. Lang so beautifully puts it, "You need not follow Ponce de Léon to the Western Wilderness, when, in any river you knew of yore, you can find the Fountain of Youth."

THE END

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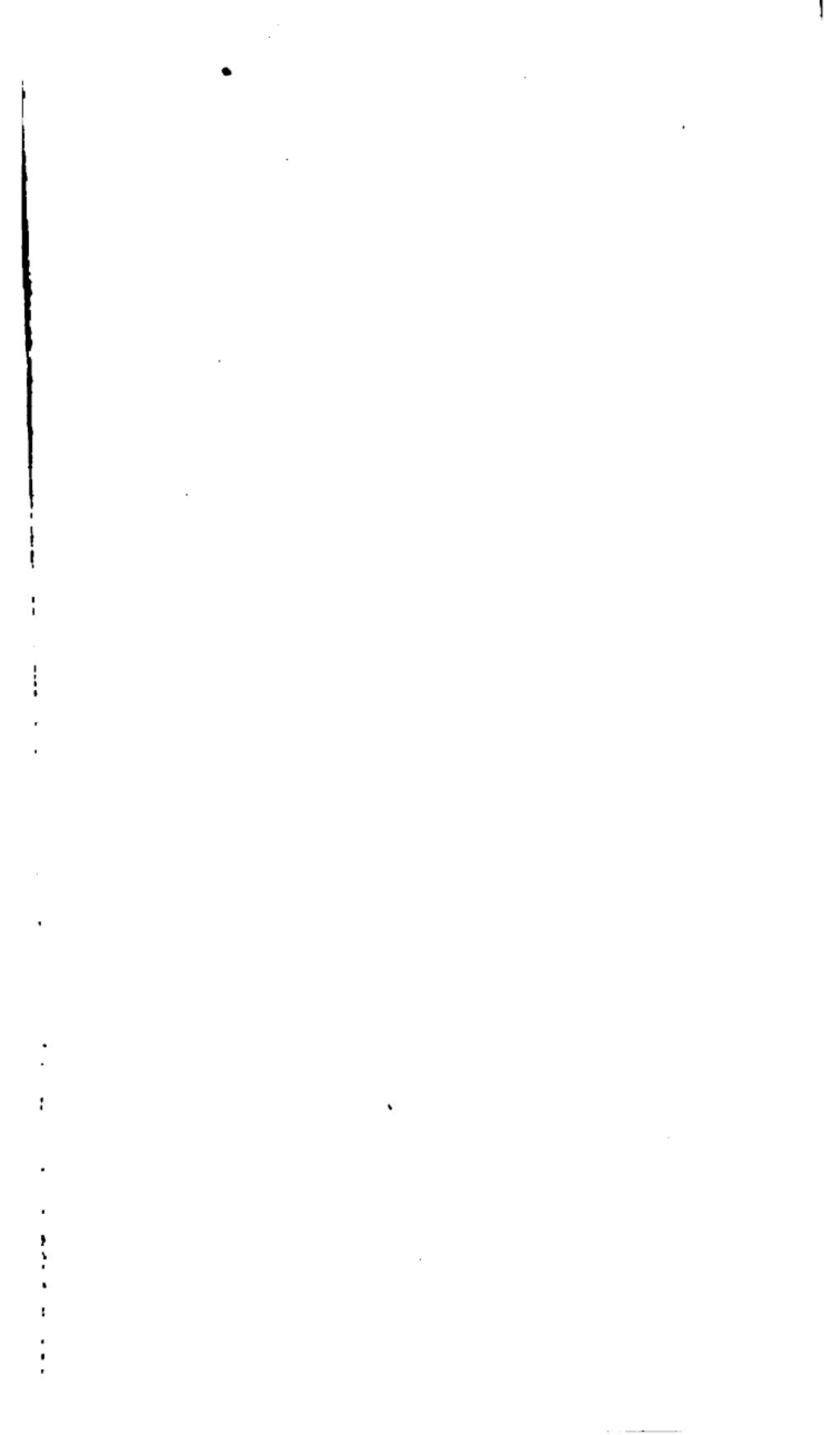
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